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The Case for Restructuring the UK Secondary School

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In this article I aim to review some of the issues which emanate from the typical organizational structures in the UK secondary school. In particular, I focus on the relations between 'pastoral' and 'academic' functions. I examine their connectedness, coordination and the like, in the light of reviewing wider evidence on the impact of the organization of secondary schools. Some alternatives for linking tutoring and teaching are proposed, and a suggestion is made that the time is right.

Introduction: Schools as Organizations

Secondary schools are curious organizations, from many points of view. Their basic design remains that

of the Victorian factory, where separated departments independently contribute to the final product, which is shipped in its formative stages from one to another for disconnected processing. The hope is that a final product is in some sense a finished product (although the post-Victorian invention of 'finishing schools' demonstrated the belief that further work was required for the final product to gain a coherent presentation). While many organizations in our changing world develop new structural forms, the secondary school soldiers on, mainly unchanged. The current form has been likened to an egg-crate (Lortie, 1975), and we must consider whether there are ways in which this form may, or indeed should, change.

Internally, there are other curious features to be found. For example, schools' approaches to decision-making are the subject of various claims which would be deemed spurious in other organizations. One is the idea of democratic decision-making which has been espoused by educators, but would be heartily questioned elsewhere. As a way of talking, it may divert us from realizing that some secondary schools are the most hierarchical organizations in Western Europe. And their culture, which, after all, is the most influential aspect, does not always support their goals.

At a broad level, the terms in which we view secondary schools as organizations are not agreed. Further, it seems that many teachers do not view themselves as members of an organization at all, seeing themselves more as individual artisans who happen to work in a somewhat collective context. This indicates the key themes which are increasingly recognized as central to our understanding of schools – professional isolation and professional autonomy. Teachers have been described as psychologically alone in densely populated settings: this is not uniform across schools, and the extent to which teachers are isolated makes a great difference to their functioning and that of the school. The issue of professional autonomy/isolation underlies much of our thinking about schools as organizations, and three general positions have been identified (Ingersoll, 1994):

1. Schools are 'organized anarchies' which exist in a loosely coupled system. They have to be like this

because the task of educating children is incompatible with formal bureaucratization.

2. Schools are loosely organized and this is a source of their ineffectiveness. Politicians have to intervene, by standardizing curriculum and setting up external accountability agencies so that top-down control is improved.
3. Schools are highly formalized and bureaucratized institutions when considering their main goals of learning and socialization. The lack of suitability for purpose is the source of underfunctioning in a learning society. Compulsory education has become compulsive education.

Whichever of these positions a person adopts will influence their focus when discussing a school, what they perceive as a problem, and what they see as a solution. In the last decade, the education system in the UK has experienced a great increase in controls through politicians increasing the legislation. Their position is generally that of the second point described above. Whether headteachers and teachers adopt the same rhetoric to the same degree is not known.

I take the stance that schools are expected to accomplish multiple and complex goals. These may be grouped in four main areas: competence in skills described as 'basic', such as literacy and numeracy; work habits and personal habits suitable for adulthood; academic achievements through the formal curriculum; and personal growth to help young people compose a life and make a difference in the world. The extent to which these are achieved depends on many features of school style, culture, structure, approach to learning and learners. Secondary schools differ significantly in these features, and this influences which goals are achieved and to what extent. Current debate has become somewhat fixed on curricular/exam achievements, but the evidence demonstrates that school has significant impact on the less-easy-to-measure aspects of personal growth, including the young person's sense of self, belief in their own competence, images of life possibilities, and conceptions of how a social system beyond the family functions (Minuchin, *et al.*, 1969; Minuchin and Shapiro, 1983).

The Pastoral and the Academic

The UK secondary school has invented an organizational specialization which is not found in other countries. This begins with a recognition of two aspects of every teacher's role: 'Every teacher is also a tutor', as one school advertisement puts it. From the starting point of two functions, however, an organizational specialization has developed which places every teacher (give or take a few) as a member of two teams, each with its own leader and its own sub-hierarchy in the school. This is, of course, what is

regularly referred to as the 'pastoral-academic split'. But the mere existence of these elements does not necessarily mean a split – it is too simple to suggest that. We know that, at worst, these two elements can develop their own goals and practices, which relate poorly to each other, and that these can become power bases within the school: just as some schools have been described as 'run by curriculum barons', there are also those 'run by pastoral barons'. In each case, the style of power being exercised is generally not that which achieves the school's major goals: it is more about turf wars and status differences between the adults. So when a teacher says to me, 'What you have to realize about this school is that the Heads of Year keep it together', I am inclined to think that lower order goals of control have taken precedence and that higher goals of pupil development are being sacrificed. Or when a headteacher says to me, 'I've got rid of the pastoral-academic split: I've got rid of tutors', then again a simplification of goals has occurred which privileges teaching and foregoes any learning from the overview of pupils' experience.

Although these are extreme examples, the issue they highlight is very common: it is that the two perspectives gained by the majority of staff (their subject teaching and their tutoring) are rarely brought together and utilized in a regular and constructive manner. So teachers are treated in a rather schizophrenic fashion: rather than their two functions being resourced and supported for their contribution to overall learning and achievement, staff have to juggle both responsibilities as though they compete with each other, and understandably many staff make trade-off decisions about which to prioritize. In my first years as a teacher I was happy to be a teacher of maths, a form tutor, and a teacher of social education, but my understandings gleaned from these three perspectives were never brought together by any process in the school.

So a key question begins to emerge: can a school achieve pastoral goals and functions without having a separated pastoral hierarchy?

Our answer requires consideration of what we take the pastoral goals of the school to be. These are not always clarified, either in school or in writings about school. I take the NAPCE (1986) listing, which proposes that the goals are to:

- provide a point of personal contact with every student,
- provide a point of personal contact with parents,
- monitor pupil progress across the whole curriculum,
- offer support and guidance for pupil achievement,
- provide colleagues with information to adapt teaching,

- promote a school which meets pupils' needs,
- encourage a caring and orderly environment,
- engage wider networks as appropriate, and
- evaluate the effective achievement of these goals.

No separate organizational hierarchy is written into these goals. They may imply a role for a tutor, but they also indicate contributions from the whole school, which at minimum requires good communications. From the recognition that the pastoral goals of the school cannot be achieved by tutors on their own, two possible responses can be identified: (i) that pastoral and academic hierarchies have to be effectively coordinated, or (ii) pastoral and academic hierarchies need a fundamental rethink. Increasingly, I take the second view, partly because of research findings now available.

Research Evidence on Well-connected Schools

Clear evidence has emerged about secondary schools which operate in a communally organized and collaborative fashion. They get better results and for a wider range of pupils. For this wider evidence on the effects of school structure, we have to turn to the USA, where schools are regularly surveyed for research purposes and research centres on the theme are funded.¹

Tony Bryk, in a study of 340 secondary schools in Chicago, has shown that schools vary in their degree of communal organization. Some score highly: they have developed collegial relations among adults coupled with a 'diffuse' teacher role, which brings teachers into frequent contact with other staff and with students in settings other than the classroom. They also 'attend to the needs of students for affiliation and ... provide a rich spectrum of adult roles [that] can have positive effects on the ways both students and teachers view their work. Adults engage students personally and challenge them to engage in the life of the school' (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988; Bryk, Lee and Smith, 1990).

Schools that scored high on an index of communal organization showed higher teacher efficacy and satisfaction, higher staff morale, higher teacher enjoyment of work, and lower teacher absenteeism. Students in such schools were more interested in academic achievements, were absent from school less often, and were more orderly. Their achievement was higher in the only achievement outcome variable considered – mathematics (Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993).

I read these findings to say something crucial about the way schools are organised: a personal-communal model is more effective than a rational-bureaucratic model (Lee, Bryk and Smith, 1993).

In the USA there is a movement among some high schools, which is termed 'restructuring', but it does not mean solely organizational restructuring. It refers to 'major departures from conventional practice designed to foster critical thinking and high academic performance from all students'. An analysis of national survey data on 830 such schools (Lee and Smith, 1995) showed that the features which characterize them included (in order of likelihood): students keeping the same 'homeroom' (tutor and tutor group) throughout high school, an emphasis on staff solving school problems, interdisciplinary teaching teams, independent study in English and humanities, mixed-ability classes in maths/science, and a co-operative learning focus. Forty-six per cent of the high schools reported that they engaged in at least three of a list of twelve such features.

In those schools, gains in academic performance for 14- and 16-year-olds were at least 20 per cent above the gains in schools which used 'traditional' approaches to their own development, such as departmentalization, streaming, thinking skills, etc. Schools which used no practices for improvement were on average 10 per cent below. Further, student gains were distributed more equitably – that is, the achievement gap between students of lower and those of higher socio-economic status was narrower in restructured schools. Two years later, the achievement gains associated with restructuring were maintained (Lee, Smith and Croninger, 1995). In 789 schools, even after taking into account the demographic characteristics of students and schools, almost 10,000 students in the restructuring schools showed larger academic gains. In fact, the restructuring effects on learning in maths and science actually increased during the later years of school.

Explaining these results, Lee develops further the view of a communally organized school: 'teachers work collaboratively, often in teams that are formed across subjects. Instead of being governed by top-down directives, teachers have more input into decisions affecting their work. And instead of slotting students into different educational paths, a communal school would group students of diverse talents and interests together for instruction' (Lee and Smith, 1994, page 2). In other analyses, Lee also highlights the significant achievement gains in schools where teachers take collective responsibility for students' academic success or failure rather than blaming students for their own failure (Lee and Smith, 1996). Achievement gains were also higher in schools with more staff co-operation.

So a communal, collective and collaborative approach is important. It enhances the degree of connectedness felt by the members of a school organization. Similar findings have emerged from Susan Rosenholtz's (1991) study of 78 Tennessee schools. In schools with above average teacher collaboration,

there are more requests for and offers of collegial advice, engaging a wider range of colleagues than in low-collaboration schools. The content of discussions about learners is more productive, focusing on improving their learning rather than on seeking sympathy about poor behaviour. In these schools, teaching is seen as a complex, non-routine undertaking, and a collective rather than individual enterprise. Teachers experience a greater sense of commitment, and feel a sense of progress and movement in the school: the school is 'moving' as opposed to 'stuck'. Collaborative schools are also learning-enriched: teachers find more opportunities to learn, and they see their own learning as cumulative and developmental.

When it comes to the students in collaborative schools, the evidence shows that their gains are greater in reading and in maths. These gains also correlated significantly with teachers' learning opportunities and the extent to which teachers see teaching as non-routine: 'We find that the greater teachers' opportunities for learning, the more their students tend to learn' (Rosenholtz, 1991, page 7).

The most recent evidence on UK secondary schools confirms that some of the same processes are emerging here. John Gray and others (Gray *et al.*, 1999) have analysed secondary school examination data over a number of years and shown that the national rate of improvement as measured by examination performance has slowed down since the introduction of GCSE. Yet some schools are improving faster than these national norms, and doing so consistently. In summarizing their findings on the strategies which such schools have used, these authors propose that schools have gone through three approaches in the last decade. First, they have adopted new tactics to maximize their showing in the performance tables (enter more pupils, mentor the 'borderlines', etc.). Second, they have adopted internal strategies to improve their schools (giving more responsibility to pupils, building improvement strategies in particular departments, integrating pastoral and academic responsibilities). Third, the small group of the highest improving schools has shifted beyond these two into an area which builds its capacity to improve, through an overarching focus on learning.

At this point, we can see how the evidence in the USA and in the UK points to a key connection: there is a link between community organization and collaboration, and a focus on learning. So the qualities of connectedness are not valued just for their own sake (although that should not be denied): they also link to the accomplishment of other goals of the school. In this sense, the focus on communal and collaborative features of organizations has key value for a school, since it moves us on from an organization which is subject-centred, past the potential trap of learner-

centred (a not very meaningful term at best), to the position of being learning-centred – for pupils, teachers and the organization itself.

I take the view that the restructuring of the secondary school is not only necessary for the strategic reasons which Gray *et al.* (1999) identify: if it leads to a restructured focus on learning then it also contributes to capacity-building.

So What, and What can be Done?

Many implications follow from the above surveys of large numbers of schools. The implications for the style of management of schools are particularly crucial. It does not make sense to run a school like a machine: results will suffer on all dimensions, for both students and staff. It does not make sense to force bureaucratic practices into the organization as an attempt to increase its connectivity or coordination: rather the development of teams and of shared goals has to be supported in a more organic way. Many of the practices which have beset some UK secondary schools in the last decade, as responses to the particular interventions created by legislation, have the hallmarks of a mechanical approach to change and improvement: streaming, selected involuntary mentoring, enforced target-setting, more teaching to the test, increased 'line management', marketization and league tables all point to a domination of performance over learning. In this context, with the added element of fear of public shame, schools behave more like frightened organizations and their personal-social fabric is at risk (Watkins, 1999). Teachers may be forgiven for feeling that they are now working in someone else's factory. The overall impact of these changes is to create a more divided and divisive education system, in which the differences increase between the performance of pupils, between schools (Office for Standards in Education, 1998), and the gap between the most and least successful LEAs is growing (Audit Commission, 1999). It is deeply frustrating that central government (and the increasingly controlled local government) continue with the strategy of standardization and routinization, when the research evidence on the school shows it to be a less effective means of management than complex problem-solving which engages lateral communication. Similarly, it is frustrating that many current approaches to the teaching profession embody a strategy of increasing control rather than increasing commitment, when a range of studies have demonstrated rather persuasively that teachers' commitment to schooling can be affected by increasing their influence in school decision-making, by raising their levels of collegiality, and by extending their roles (Rowan, 1990).

Evidence, including that reviewed above, supports a continued and productive focus on the personal-

social dimensions of schooling, in the service of learning both for students and teachers. The current context needs this just as ever before, but the extra challenge for a school is to keep that focus alive in a political and controlling climate which tries to dishonour it. Managing a school now requires that forms of buffering against the external political agendas are created, and that differences between the politician's and the professional educator's agendas are recognized.

What Would Restructuring Involve?

As we return from the broad picture to the particular issue of 'pastoral and academic', the question has now become more one of *can the achievement of pastoral goals in a school be handled in a way which contributes to collaboration and community in a school, and therefore to a learning-centred culture?* I believe the answer to be a definite 'yes', as long as structural matters of the secondary school are addressed. Structure is not everything, but it strongly influences the culture of a school, especially on the key dimensions of connectedness, collaboration and community.

Coordination and connectedness have to grapple with the typical subject-based form of organizing. Clusters of subjects, faculties or the like may make a little difference (although perhaps less than at one school which had a long-standing strategy of only appointing teachers to teach two subjects). As long as the subject department remains the major building block of the organization, some of the school's overarching goals may not be achieved. A framework is required within which the contributions of the subjects may be coordinated, but there is no sign of this from current UK policy. Dutch educators have argued that any attempt to promote a coordinated approach to wider themes will fail without it (Boersma and Hooghoff, 1993). Certainly attempts to develop cross-curricular themes seem to have made that point (Whitty, Rowe and Aggleton, 1994). In this light, it can be seen why a school strategy of creating additional coordinator posts is often ineffectual: it seems that every time the subject-centred school identifies a difficulty which reflects its structure, it appears to want to solve the problem by throwing a coordinator at it (only most of them are low status and not given a position in the structure whereby they could achieve much).

Improved coordination between posts in the existing sub-hierarchies has been attempted in a range of ways. Amongst these are the development of senior management teams (or in some cases called whole-school teams) in which headteachers and assistant headteachers and other senior teachers operate as a team, with flexible allocation of tasks to persons, rotation of roles, and so on. Although a move away from Deputy Head (Pastoral) and Deputy Head (Curriculum) is welcome, these developments have

often not progressed very far: Deputy Head (Students) and Deputy Head (Staff) is not much of a change. So in many schools, the turf wars remain despite re-labelling. At the level of 'middle managers' other attempts have been made at coordination, often through a variant of 'HoD/HoY meetings'. Again, such meetings have been given a variety of new labels, but their dynamic has not always been successful. They can be overlarge and cumbersome, or dominated by one 'side' or the other, and the very fact that a meeting is composed of team leaders encourages them to 'represent' these teams – that is, to fight their corner. To identify some of these micro-politics, I often pose two simple inquiries of such meetings: who decides the agenda, and who talks most. It is seldom that I find examples of balanced agenda-setting, balanced contributions and a valuable discussion of how to enhance learning.

The focus of these coordination attempts is the teacher and the formal roles: the hope is to solve problems by adding further roles or adding links between roles. Seen like this, they show their bureaucratic credentials: as a result, they do not build capacity or focus on learning, and they are wasteful of energies which deserve not to be wasted. The alternative is an organic approach to coordination which aims to nurture teams and the cross-fertilization of the various perspectives which teachers currently hold. This perspective leads us to consider team composition (although not in a rigid bureaucratic manner) and the use of perspectives to enhance learning – and first of all the teachers' learning.

In our search for better structures, it is important to clarify our starting points: mine is that the job of teaching in a secondary school should continue to include a subject-teaching role and a student tutoring role, plus those wider contributions which build the sense of community in the place. Even though I have been into schools where the majority of staff do not want to tutor (and I could see why), I think these schools underachieved in terms of everyone's learning. A school which tolerates a teacher saying, 'I'm just a teacher of X' (where X is their teaching subject) now has to recognize that such a teacher is a liability in terms of the wider learning of the organization. As Peter Senge (1990) has put it, the 'I am my position' constitutes a major learning disability in any organization, since it confuses job with identity, and views one's performance without reference to the whole. The tutoring aspect of the teacher's job puts them into another perspective, which not only makes an important addition, it also has important implications for the teaching role. We know that more effective teachers can take the focus off themselves when teaching, and can focus on student learning: one context to develop that is the tutoring context, where the focus is both student-centred and learning-centred. With these two elements in place, the task is to design the processes to weave the teacher's

experience of subject classroom and student tutoring into a combined emphasis on learning.

Rather than build two separate sub-hierarchies from these two aspects of the teacher's role, each with its own team structure, a school could compose its structure from a different single building block: it would be a team composed of the key teachers and key tutors of a year group. I use the adjective 'key' because it soon becomes clear that to think of all teachers and tutors of a year in one team is unmanageable. So the core members of this team would be teachers of the main subjects and as many of the tutors as reasonable. Here, the logistics of team composition are greatly eased in those schools where tutors teach their subject to their tutor group. This is a feature which is usually put in place so that the student-teacher-tutor relationship may be enhanced, but the extra knowledge gained by the teacher is not used in the organization.

This idea sometimes unearths in teachers assumptions which again show their bureaucratic roots. The possibility that not all members need to be at a meeting, or that lone teachers of subjects such as music might choose which year meeting to attend, is beyond comprehension for a few. I am reminded of other occasions when people express attachment to dysfunctional systems, or beliefs in structures which seem to favour control rather than development.

The name of such a team could be important. When discussing the advantages of such a model for the creation of whole-curriculum perspectives (Whalley and Watkins, 1991, 1992), we called this a Year Curriculum Team. Now I would choose to call it a Year Learning Team. It would have to operate in a way which was worthy of the title 'team' – that is, clarify a shared conception of its task/goal, decide the means to achieve it, allocate roles, and review its own progress and functioning.

Any team achieves its goals through its work, and not through its meetings, but the potential for exchanging and developing new perspectives in these team meetings would be very considerable and would have a good chance of direct application into practice. The agenda would properly cover many matters which reflect the learning quality in the year, ranging from curriculum and teaching plans and concerns, through new understandings from the students' perspective, to particular concerns about non-learning, including individual behaviour concerns. What this structure also is likely to support is more of the currently rare but regularly valuable meetings which are composed of the teachers of a particular class or of a particular individual. Schools experimenting with this structure have found it valuable to start working on issues which spanned the old pastoral-academic divide: examples include experiences of pupil progress, patterns of homework, patterns of behaviour.

On occasions when I have visited schools experimenting with this idea, I am struck by the style of conversation and ways of talking between teachers: they are different from those in most other schools. Not only are they more collaborative, in the way that Rosenholtz (1991) identified, but they show more integrated ways of talking about pupils, with the focus on learning rather than on the split perspectives of the past.

Would this be just more meetings? No, because in time the need for separate subject and tutor meetings would be felt much less than they are now (despite the fact that currently most meetings are very ineffective, they can be held onto as a totem). A different role would emerge for the subject team meeting, and I feel it would be a more appropriate position than that from the days of the subject barons, where the department meeting was seen to be the teacher's main arena. The subject departments of the secondary school (Siskin, 1994) can be an arena, but of a very variable sort. For teachers, their departments can become centres of professional loyalty, sites of interpersonal conflict, clubs of counterculture, or an anomic version of none of these. I take the view that this range of possibilities only exists because departments are first and foremost a means of teacher grouping in the secondary school, and are not a grouping for anyone else (in this, they contrast with college where students and teachers affiliate to the course, or primary schools, where teachers and pupils affiliate to the class). As a result, they become the arenas for teacher identities to be played out in any of a range of directions, especially if there is a weak overarching affiliation. They therefore do not compose an adequate organizational arrangement for the necessary focus on pupil learning, nor an adequate model for knowledge in the future (in which it has been calculated that by 2020 the knowledge base will be doubling every 73 days (Bayliss, 1999)).

Teachers need some social networks with which they can affiliate in the organization, especially in the large school, but there is no good reason why this should be subject department affiliation (nor tutoring, for that matter). We have to work towards a situation where departmental affiliation is loosened to some degree and a broader affiliation to the learning goals of the school are strengthened. I think the idea of the Year Learning Team provides an important vehicle for much of that changed teacher affiliation.

What happens to the roles we have known? Heads of Year, for whom the title 'Head of' has called out numerous authoritarian responses, can come out of the cupboard. They will need, with the help of everyone else in the organization, to loosen the forces which have held them there, especially the discipline trap (see Mike Evans, this issue), and learn the new methods needed for an overarching role in the school (see Mike Reading and Charles Harper, this issue).

There may also be implications for how headteachers view their own leadership in schools, moving from managers in charge to facilitators on call (Bredeson, 1993). But it may be more important to get a team description working than to focus first on individualized role descriptions. A role is more than a list of tasks: it is a set of relationships between the role-holder and the various role partners. It's much better to say something about these relations than to write the usual old lists. The main responsibility of the Year Learning Coordinator will be to lead the Year Learning Team and students, to identify the team development needs and ensure they are met, to facilitate the learning of this team. The main responsibility of the team will be to review pupil learning and the forces which affect it, to promote coherence in the whole curriculum for the year, including the support and guidance to students in the year, and do this in communication with other years and relevant whole-school forums.

There will be many forces which will work against the sort of change I have been outlining: general organizational inertia, attachment to outdated identities, and the assumptions embedded in many of the external policy, curriculum and finance directives (see Caroline Lodge, this issue). But the last decade has shown that the schools which take charge of change are the ones which achieve most for all concerned. The culture and history of some schools will not support them taking this vision on board. Sadly, I believe that some of the schools who do not consider restructuring are exactly those who need it most: they are the schools which need to move, else they risk decline. I say, 'sadly', because no pupils or teachers deserve to be in a school which is declining, and those which are in this state are disproportionately serving disadvantaged communities who also deserve better.

These moves will take a degree of non-conformity from leaders and followers alike. This is known to be a feature of moving schools. As part of her survey, Susan Rosenholtz (1991) asked teachers, 'Do you ever have to do things that are against the rules in order to do what's best for your students?' In moving schools, 79 per cent of staff said 'Yes', whereas in 'stuck' schools, 75 per cent said, 'No' (pp. 157-8). Attitudes of conformity and compliance, although encouraged by external forces, are not what makes a school which has care and learning at its heart. The sense of community, collaboration and learning may be better served by the greater connectedness which a different structure can encourage.

Note

1. See, for example, the Center for Research on the Context of Secondary Teaching (CRC) at Stanford University, and the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS) at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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